

2018 STUDENT WRITING CONTEST

Central Region Essay Winner

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To truly understand and write about this topic, I had to do some more research on Mavis Claytor-Ford. She was the first African-American student to graduate from the University of Virginia's nursing program. Even though she got accepted to the university, college life was not easy for her at all. She had to live in a hotel for over a month because she could not secure a dorm room as an African-American student. After running out of money, Claytor-Ford turned to the dean of the nursing program, Mary Lohr, for help. Lohr was able to get her a dorm to stay in. Claytor-Ford's story is one of perseverance and resilience. Even under abysmal circumstances, she was able to pull through and pursue the career dreams she always wanted.

The story of Claytor-Ford is one that is very relatable to me. It makes me think of the profound words of 2Pac in "The Rose That Grew from Concrete": Proving nature's laws wrong, it learned 2 walk without having feet. Funny it seems, but by keeping its dreams, it learned 2 breathe fresh air. Being an adolescent African-American male from Petersburg, Virginia, has put certain stereotypes against me. For me to be the young man that I am today—and growing every day into the man that I will become—is a constant struggle.

Every day, I have to challenge individuals who I encounter to not believe or see those stereotypes that may be in their minds about me and the thousands of other young African-American adolescent males that are just like me. I acknowledge that I and my family have made numerous sacrifices to allow me to have the life experiences that I have had thus far. For that, I am grateful. Claytor-Ford's story relates to my life for many reasons. One of the main reasons that stands out more than others to me is that, like Claytor-Ford, I am in a predominately white school. There are not many minority groups here. I feel like her story inspires me to keep pushing and to keep working even when the going gets rough.